



# 2024 - 2025 Annual Impact Report



## Who are Think Circus?

Think Circus is an Edinburgh-based social circus, running community-based circus classes and projects across the city, including Leith, Granton and Craigmillar. Our mission is to take circus beyond the big top, contributing to a happier, healthier society. We are driven by core values of connection, quality and playfulness. You can find us popping up in local parks and community hubs with our Circus Bike, illuminating the evenings with our spell-binding fire and light performances, and encouraging young people to express themselves and build their confidence and skills through our regular projects. We teach easy to learn ground-based circus arts such as juggling, acrobatics, stilt-walking, hula hoop and balance skills, that don't require expensive equipment and can be continued without us long after the initial spark.





**Girls Forest Circus**

## What we are trying to do:

Our mission is to take circus beyond the big top, contributing to a happier, healthier society. We are driven by core values of connection, quality and playfulness. We aim for:

- Circus to be accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic circumstances, experience of arts and sport, or ability.
- Circus to be recognized as a distinct artform - a unique blend of physical skill and visual theatre.
- Scotland to be seen as a place where talent is nurtured, and innovative practice is developed through collaboration.
- Circus artists to be supported at each stage of their journey, from first picking up a circus prop to making their first act, to going on tour or producing their own work.
- Collaboration across our sector, including sharing our business model, learning and practices generously, so that social circus can be delivered across Scotland and the UK.

## How we do it:

Circus is all about creative physicality; pushing the limits of what is possible. Audiences, artists and participants can discover that their perceptions of possibility can be re-imagined, which helps to overcome fear of failure and build confidence. It also leads to regular creative and physical practice, participating in arts and culture, and feeling an increased sense of belonging. Circus is an unexpected way to engage children and young people who might not think the arts are for them, and a much-needed way for adults to rediscover their playful, creative side.



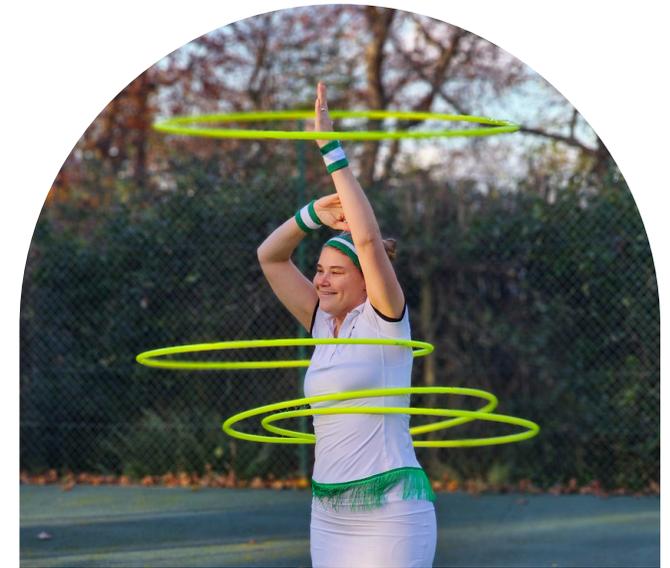
### Shows and Performances:

We create circus acts and shows, both through events, gala days and festivals, and for private bookings. We work with over 65 artists and operate as an agency and production house on a small scale to support touring work and circus performance across Scotland.



### Community - Youth and Education:

We run weekly classes for ages 5-11, a Teen Circus Club, Girls Forest Circus, community 'jams', and Sunday Family Circus. We run school circus days and projects. We also offer online courses for adults in juggling, hula hoop, poi and the history of Scottish circus.



### Artist Development:

Our approach is to facilitate growth for circus artists, so that they are equipped and supported as they continue in their chosen career. We run Flourish, a programme of artist workshops, masterclasses and creation sessions, and an annual festival, HoopScotch.

## Letter from Kat

Kat Borrowdale, Think Circus'  
Executive Director and founder



Circus showcases the best of human potential, through imaginative stories and physical feats. But for me, the reason I stay in love with circus is the community around it. People cheer on the success of person next to them, let go of the need to be perfect, and celebrate their playful side. In times where the world is ever more serious, and people across Edinburgh and the world feel disconnected from their physical bodies and each other, our art and our community has never been more needed.

Over the last year, the Think Circus team have leaned into collaboration and community more than ever before. We became a member of Caravan, Europe's international youth and social circus network, and took part in our first cultural exchange project with Junges Theater Muenster (DE). Closer to home, we have been a key part of efforts to bring a Leith church into community ownership, and formed new partnerships with community hubs across the city with our Sunday Circus Programme. We have been fortunate to receive multi-year funding from several funders, helping us to move towards a more sustainable model of planning. In 2025-26, we look forward to continuing to collaborate and create with our friends in Edinburgh and further beyond. It's a promise to stay hopeful, stay creative, and stay connected to joy.



**School Workshop**

# Highlights

1,160

unique visits to our community sessions

15,430

participants in circus workshops



31

Girls Forest Circus regular participants

15

Teen Circus participants

30

5-11s classes and circus camps participants

6

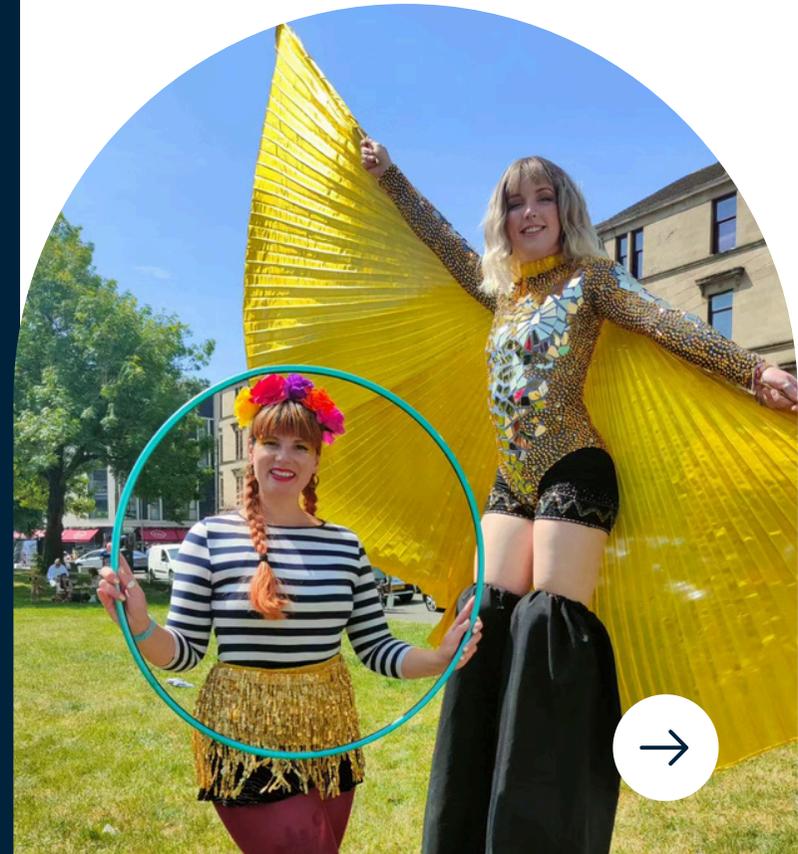
artist development workshops hosted

74

community groups we worked with

97

one-off community workshops delivered



130

Event bookings including galas, festivals and community events

121 clients

65 artists supported

37%

of clients booked more than once



## Community Projects

including Outside the Box, adult classes and UpSkill Socials

87

workshop participants

355

attended our celebration events



75

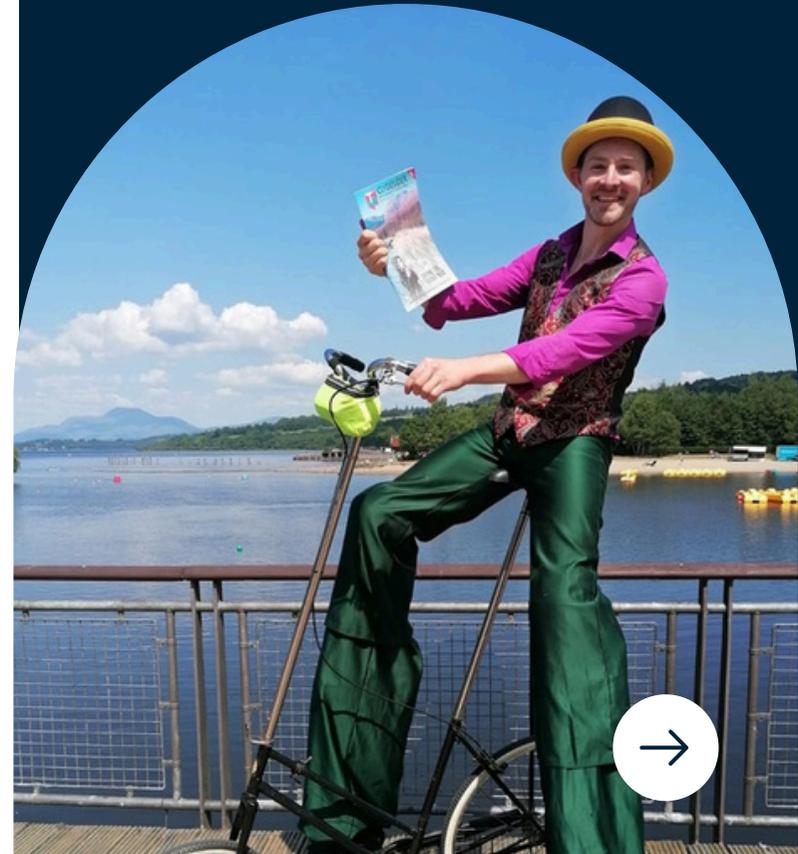
members of community jam group

345

volunteer hours donated

19

active volunteers



## What we achieved:

Over the last year, we have built up our team, bringing on board a new Volunteers Co-ordinator who has supported us to trial out Social Media placements and UpSkill Socials. Our custom-built circus bike has transformed how we deliver our open circus drop-in sessions, and made a huge impact in our levels of engagement and ability to reach new audiences and wider demographics. We also streamlined our booking process, allowing us to better support artists. We are enormously proud of our achievements over this year. This will help Think Circus to thrive in the long-term so we are better able to support our participants.

### Flourish Artist Development

We delivered 6 sessions for the freelance creative professionals we work with, including Act Creation with Jusztina Hermann, Therapeutic approach to workshops with Tanya Fourie, and Ensemble techniques with Sarah BeBe Holmes. Local artists are connected to ongoing learning opportunities such as our Sunday community circus sessions and jams.



### Sunday Circus and Circus Bike:

We have long dreamed of being able to deliver circus workshops within the city without having to drive, but the challenge of transporting awkwardly shaped circus kit such as hula hoops made it tricky. With support from Cycling UK, we were able to work with XYZ Cargo to commission a custom-built and designed e-cargo bike perfect for circus! It's a big hit so far.



### UpSkill Socials:

These sessions, held up to six times a year, bring together volunteers, circus artists and the Think Circus team to learn new skills and build community. The skills covered are chosen in response to regular surveys, and included marketing for circus artists, show production, and act creation. Social activities included painting, a pot luck and a film showing.



Girls have grown in self-awareness and now often choose kindness over other forms of communication. Their ability to self-regulate and build relationships has improved particularly for our neurodivergent girls. Confidence and growing self-esteem have also been a key output of this project owing to the unique blend of circus skills, theatre, and bush craft activity. All of which have built skills for life, learning and work while developing a growth mindset. It is one of the highest and most consistently attended after-school activities we offer.

Katie Maxwell, Head Teacher, Castleview Primary

I love circus class. If I had to choose between a hundred bars of chocolate and this class, I'd choose this class!  
- Nina, age 9

Our child has been coming to Circus for well over a year and has developed the most amazing skills. The great skills they have developed not only include the physical circus skills but actually, more importantly, the social and personal skills which have contributed to them growing in confidence as a person. They have developed greater self-belief and self-acceptance from being involved with the welcoming and positive culture offered by all those involved with Teen Circus. - Parent



### Online Learning:

We have continued to promote our free online Learn to Juggle in Five Days course. This is accessed regularly and provides a small source of passive income.

### Dive In:

We produced an original piece of circus theatre, featuring acrobatics, lollipop hoop, juggling and theatre, and debuted at Fringe by the Sea in summer 2024. The show was based around a trip to the seaside, beginning in normality and ascending into dreams of kelpies, storms and rescue signals. We were delighted with the reception from the audience and hope to perform this show again in the future.



### Outside the Box:

We ran two camps with 15 participants over nine days, the majority coming from the local areas of Leith, Newhaven and Granton. Participants were aged 5-13 yrs. Think Circus attracted new participants to our regular classes. The project culminated in two celebration events at Leith Walk Police Box, where the children's circus showcase took place along with performances from professional circus artists.



### Game, Set, Juggle:

Following an idea from our Team Away Day in September 2024, Think Circus artists Bob, Antonia and Keith led on the creation of a new outdoor juggling show, which plays with sport motifs in circus performance, pattern, play and friendly competition.

This fun and playful show has enthralled young audiences at several events from small gala days to larger festivals in 2025.

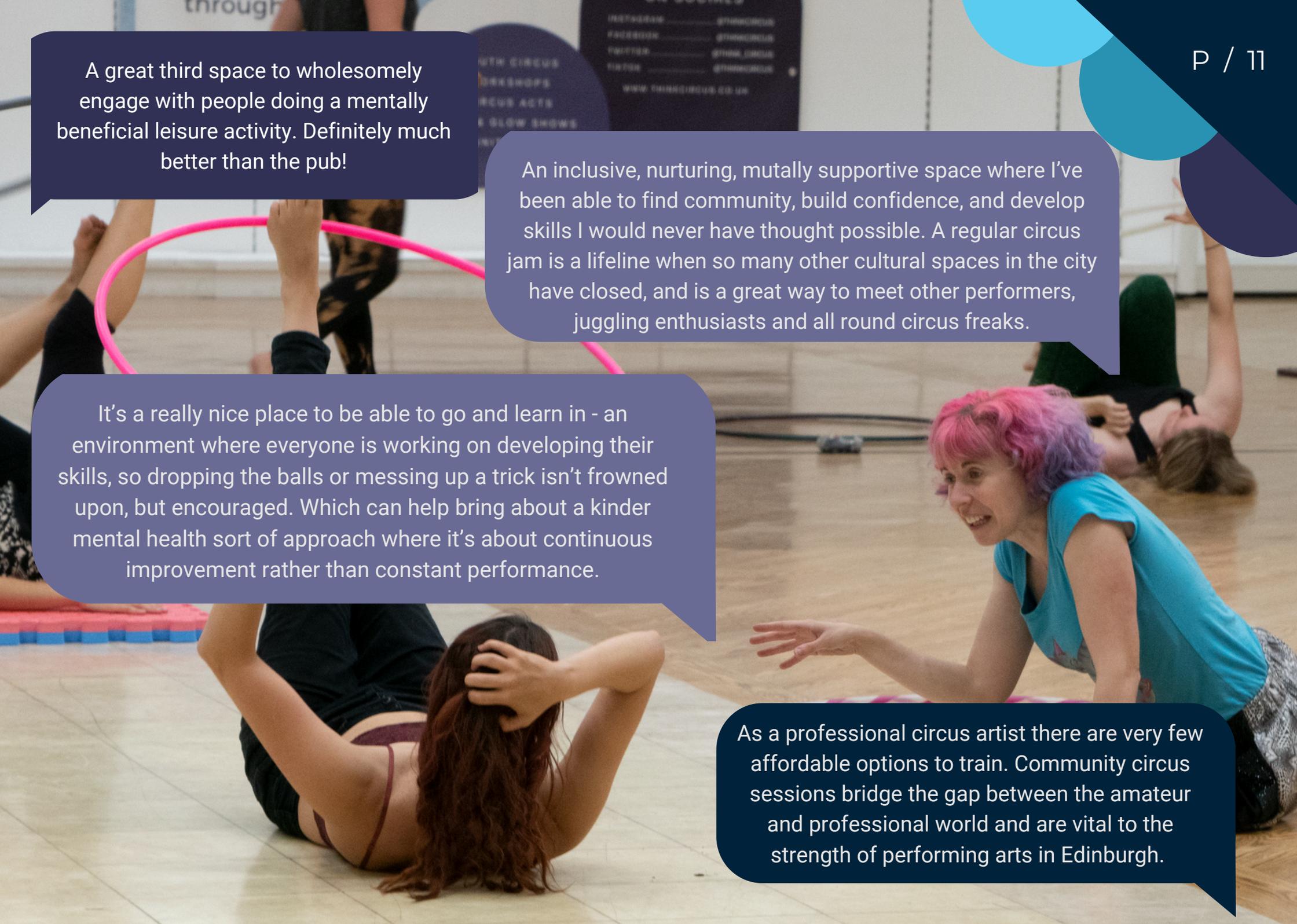


A great third space to wholesomely engage with people doing a mentally beneficial leisure activity. Definitely much better than the pub!

An inclusive, nurturing, mutually supportive space where I've been able to find community, build confidence, and develop skills I would never have thought possible. A regular circus jam is a lifeline when so many other cultural spaces in the city have closed, and is a great way to meet other performers, juggling enthusiasts and all round circus freaks.

It's a really nice place to be able to go and learn in - an environment where everyone is working on developing their skills, so dropping the balls or messing up a trick isn't frowned upon, but encouraged. Which can help bring about a kinder mental health sort of approach where it's about continuous improvement rather than constant performance.

As a professional circus artist there are very few affordable options to train. Community circus sessions bridge the gap between the amateur and professional world and are vital to the strength of performing arts in Edinburgh.



## How we operate:

**Safeguarding:** Working with children and young people is integral to our model and we take our responsibilities extremely seriously. Through consultation with our teaching team and via good practice sharing from CircusWorks and EYCO (the European Youth Circus Organisation) we have developed detailed safeguarding policies and procedures (accessible on our website for all participants and parents/guardians to view). We share these policies with all staff and freelancers. We have also produced a short online learning module covering our procedures, with quiz elements to test knowledge.

**Safe Practices:** We use techniques for keeping participants safe and healthy (ie. Warmups, cooldowns, injury prevention) from CircusWorks and utilise the expertise of our teaching team.

**Fair Work:** we have published our Fair Work Statement and have produced a Fair Work Policy. Think Circus is a registered Living Wage Employer, pays industry rates above Equity and BECTU minimum, and is committed to upholding principles of Fair Work.

**Sustainability:** We conducted a review of our Sustainability practices, and launched a new policy which includes travel and materials procedures and incentives for sustainable choices. We carried out consultation and briefing with our freelance team, as our performance work spans across all of Scotland and includes 65 freelance performers.





## Thanks:

We are extremely grateful for the kind support of our supporters, volunteers, collaborators, staff members, freelance performers and participants. A huge thanks to our Funders and sponsors for making our community projects possible:



Nancie Massey Charitable Trust



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